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THE LIGHT WE LOST BY JILL SANTOPOLO: SEMIOTICS STUDY

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Abstract:

Semiotics is the study of signs and everything in our life is an indication of a sign according to both the European view represented by Ferdinand de Saussure and the American view represented by Charles Sanders Peirce. Therefore, the researcher studies semiotics in The Light We Lost (2017) for the internationally best-selling author Jill Santopolo. The researcher selects this novel as there is no study has been done so far in analyzing this novel from a semiotics viewpoint. Peirce's triadic theory of icon, index and symbol is selected as a tool in examining the selected novel.

Key words: Charles Sanders Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Jill Santopolo, Semiotics, and The Light We Lost.

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2. What is semiotics?

The word semiotics is derived from the ancient Greek sēmeion which means “sign” or “mark,” semiotics is the science of functioning of any type of symbols and signs used for communication (Cevizci, 2002; Nöth,1990, p.13). Semiotics is a tool for interpreting all signs that are used in communication, such as those in sounds, music, languages, words, traffic signs, images, advertising, architecture, painting, literature, films, cartoons, logos, or forms of behaviour and fashion (Parsa & Parsa, 2004; Rifat, 1996; Kuzu, 2016, p.4; Tsotra, Janson, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2004, p.4211).

The British visual semiotician Daniel Chandler (2007: 2) defines semiotics, as signs that can take the forms of words, sounds, images, objects, and gestures. According to the Italian philosopher and semiotician Umberto Eco (1986) “semiotics concerns everything that can be perceived as a sign". He also adds (1986:7), that semiotics is linked with everything that can be considered a sign. Thus, One concludes that everything can be a sign as long as somebody understands its meaning, whenever something stands for something other than itself. (Pauzan, 2018, p.3). For years, it has been established that every sign in society, cognition, and nature belongs to the field of semiotics. Semiotic studies are progressively attractive to anyone concerned with understanding signs(Solithatun, 2018,p.1). In modern history, semiotics became part of literary, psychology philosophy, cultural studies, literacy studies, language, and even biology. Currently, semiotics is presented in Saussure’s (1983) dyadic and Peirce’s (1998) triadic accounts of the sign, in addition to Voloshinov’s (1973) historical-materialist accounts of the social and psychological functions of signs (Prior, 2014,p.1).

3.Ferdinand de Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is a Swiss linguist. He is the father of modern Linguistics (Solithatun, 2018, p.13). Saussure became famous only after his death. Unlike Peirce, Saussure was successful in an academic career (Nöth,1990, p.56). In 1916, Saussure's Cours de linguistique générale was published from his students Bally and Sechehaye notes. The first English translation of Course in General Linguistic appeared by W. Baskin in 1959 (Nöth,1990, p.57). His theory of language has extremely affected the development of structuralism. Saussure's theory of semiotics best known as semiology has received a diverse evaluation (Nöth,1990, p.56).

Saussure (1983:15), advocated semiology as “a science which studies the role of signs as part of social life.” Regarding semiology as an arena that would “investigate the nature of signs and the laws governing them”. According to Saussure's semiology theory, the sign consists of two entities a signifier and a signified. While the signifier represents the physical measurements (the sound, the shape, and objecthood) of a sign, the signified is the thought that this sign stands for. Accordingly, the signified is the mental image of a concept, where the signifier is the term or phrase used to express that concept (Kuzu, 2016, p.40). Signifier/signified combination does not exist in separation but they need to be joined with

other signs to provide a "structural" semiotic model (Tsotra, Janson, & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2004, p.4212).

Saussure (1976) considered semiotics as a universal science wider than linguistics which includes teaching and analyzing the features of signs, their parts in society, and the procedures that they follow (Kuzu, 2016, p.40). He also believed that semiology turn into part of psychology. Although he indicates the study of customs and rites as signs, he focused principally on the nature of the linguistic sign (Prior, 2014,p.2). He suggests that language is an arbitrary system of signs, *"[L]anguage is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of all these systems"* (Solithatun, 2018,p,14).

4. Charles Sanders Peirce

According to the American scientist, mathematician, logician, philosopher and polymath Charles Sanders Peirce (1 839-1914 pronounced "purse"), who has been named *"the most original and the most versatile intellect that the Americas have so far produced"*. He is known as the founder of pragmaticism and semiotics (Weiss & Burks 1945: 383; Fisch,1980, p.1; Solithatun, 2018, p.15). His father Benjamin Peirce was a Harvard professor of astronomy and mathematics and, America's leading mathematician(Pauzan, 2018, p11). He was mainly recognized as *"one of the great figures in the history of semiotics"* and as "*the founder of the modern theory of signs*" (Weiss & Burks, 1945, p. 383). Nöth (1990) describes him as *"A universal genius in many sciences",* despite Peirce being mostly ignored by his generations. Now he is solidly celebrated as *"America's greatest philosopher".* His works consist of thousands of papers. The reputation of Peirce's writing was first recognized in the philosophical semiotics, and only later in linguistic semiotics (Nöth,1990, p.39). Peirce is known for his triadic model of the sign, in which there is an object (real or imagined), representamens (sign-vehicles), and interpretants in the minds of receivers (Prior, 2014,p,3). According to Peirce, a sign is either an icon, index, or symbol. An icon is a sign that has a direct resemb1e, simulation, or representation to the object it stands for (Sebeok, 2001, p.10). Elam (1980: 14) states that an *" icon is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes of characters of its own, and which it possesses Anything whatever, be it quality, existent individual, or law, is an Icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it".* (Elam, 1980, p. 14) Photographs are always iconic signs because they visually represent their referents. Additionally, Onomatopoeic words are also iconic signs as they stand for their referents in an auditory manner. Perfumes that are produced from certain natural scents are similarly iconic, for they mimic the scents artificially. The list could go on and on. The importance of iconicity can be seen in world representations, consciously or unconsciously, as a basic semiotics ability in most (if not all) life forms (Sebeok, 2001, p.10).

An index is a sign that refers to someone or something in terms of its location in time or space, or in link to someone or something else. A cough is an index of a cold, smoke is an index of fire (indicating where the fire is) and so on. These signs do not identify their objects

like icon signs; they show where they are. The most usual expression of indexicality is the index finger, which all people use unconsciously to refer to the location of people, things, and events (ibid.). In addition to the 'natural' cause-and-effect signs relation (Elam, 1980, p. 14).

A symbol is a sign that stands for its object in a random, yet conventional manner. Generally, words are symbolic signs. A cross figure can represent Christianity, a V-sign made with the middle and index fingers can stand symbolically for victory; The colour white is a symbol of cleanliness, innocence and purity, while dark stands for uncleanness, corruption or impurity; and the list could go on and on. All symbols are established by social convention (Sebeok, 2001, p.11).

5. Applying Charles Stander Peirce's Semiotics Theory on "The Light We Lost"

5.1. The Crown

During her birthday, Lucy and her friends were having a great time celebrating her birthday in *Faces & Names*, drinking apple martinis. Lucy was wearing *"a paper birthday crown*" (Santopolo,2017, p. 26), which is a symbol that she was the birthday princess. Later on, Gabe; which happened to be in the bar; sent them three martinis and Lucy went to thank him. He commented *"Nice crown",* Lucy laughed and slipped it off asking him to try it as an index sign that she was trying to share her happiness with him as he looked so sad (Santopolo,2017, p. 302).

"We both watched as you adjusted <u>your crown</u> flipped the fuse that said laundry room"(Santopolo,2017, p. 304)

After the death of his mother, Gabe gets sad thus under the request of violet, Lucy invited Gabe for backing cookies. Meanwhile, they decided to play *'Hide and Go Seek Castle'*. During this game Violet selected Gabe to be the king *"You can be the king"* despite that she never allowed anyone to be the king just her father "*Darren was the only person, she'd ever let to be the king"(*Santopolo,2017, p. 302). She allowed her mom to be the queen while she was the fairy *"I'm the fairy! Mommy's the queen".* Later on, there was water coming from the washing machine and Gabe helped in fixing it while he was putting his crown on *"We both watched as you adjusted your crown",* the crown is a symbol that he was the king of the house as well as Lucy's heart .

"We were making waffles for violet and Liam. You were wearing that <u>ridiculous crown</u>. We were all in matching Christmas pajamas"(Santopolo,2017, p. 314)

One night, while Lucy and her children were sick. Liam woke up crying, Darren asked her to check on him. She was too tired and sick to do so, however, she went to see him and slept beside him with Violet. She was thinking if she married Gabe would he allow her to sleep while he checked on the children meanwhile she dreamt about Gabe making waffles and wearing the crown which is again a symbol that he is the king of her dreams.

5.2. Eleven September

"A plane hit one of the twin towers"(Santopolo,2017, p. 5)

The novel opened in a lecture at Columbia University in which the heroin Lucy sat beside Gabe in a Shakespeare seminar. Meanwhile, a student came late, explaining that the reason for his delay was that *"A plane hit one of the twin towers*"(Santopolo,2017, p. 5). Through this, the reader knows the exact timing of the novel. Here 11 September is an index sign as the event of hitting the Towers becomes the reason Lucy met Gabe and acted so intimate as a reaction to the chaos.

" I made a commitment to myself on September Eleventh to live my life in a way that would give back" (Santopolo,2017, p. 243)

After getting married and having Violet, Lucy tried to go back to work, however, Darren was against the idea as he wanted Lucy to stay home and take care of Violet. Lucy explained that she committed on 11 September to be of use to society. Here, *"September Eleventh"* comes also as an index sign as it is the reason Lucy is determined to give back to her city.

"On September 11th, 2011…A decade, exactly, since the first time you and I met"(Santopolo,2017, p. 285)

"I've been thinking about you all day"…"Me too"(Santopolo,2017, p. 286)

"I realized how much it meant to talk to you that day. How I would have felt incomplete otherwise"(Santopolo,2017, p. 287)

A decade after the first meeting, Lucy is a wife and a mother yet she remembers the first time she saw Gabe. Here *" September 11th"* is an indexical sign as that exact date becomes a reason to relive her memories with Gabe. She even thought about him more due to that date. And she felt that her day is incomplete till Gabe called her. According to violet, September 11th was a day to glorify her country's police officers, firefighters and EMTs. It is Heroes Day "*September 11th* was Heroes Day"(Santopolo,2017, p. 285) which is an index sign as those are the hero who keeps America safe from such attacks.

5.3. Books

"the spaces your books left on the bookshelves"(Santopolo,2017, p. 92)

Despite his love for Lucy, Gabe decided to follow his dreams by travelling to Iraq to become a war photographer for Associated Press. Lucy was so angry and disappointed especially after he started packing so soon. She was alone with her frustration in the apartment where every detail increase her sadness. She noticed the space on the bookshelves which felt her heart with sorrow and becomes an index sign of the emptiness that Gabe left in her life and her heart.

"I read books _I can't tell you how many books_ on different people's birthing experiences, on what to expect"(Santopolo,2017, p. 233-234)

Being pregnant was a terrifying experience for Lucy as she used to see nightmares like giving birth in her office, in the subway, in a taxicab, or even seeing the baby tearing her open just like an alien. Hence, she started to read more books about other women's birthing experiences to prepare herself for what was coming as well as to stop these nightmares. Books here were a symbolic sign of motherhood as well as a healing sign from her nightmares.

"a copy of All the Light We Cannot See…noticing a piece of paper that marked your place. Page 254. That's the farthest you'll ever read in that book. You'll never finish it. Your life was interrupted, cut short"(Santopolo,2017, p. 373)

Lucy travelled to Jerusalem to see Gabe in the hospital after that she went to his apartment. She described his apartment in detail meanwhile she notice that Gabe had been reading the book " *All the Light We Cannot See*" and he reached page 254 and that is a symbolic sign that his life stopped as he cannot read any farther in this book, he cannot finish it.

5.4. Cooking

" I couldn't eat waffles without crying"(Santopolo,2017, p. 92)

Lucy was shuttered after Gabe broke up with her. One night, she took a bottle of whisky and continued drinking till she slept after spending a lot of nights unable to sleep. Lucy was so broken. Whenever she ate waffles she started crying, as it always reminded her of Gabe as they used to make waffles in his mother's waffle pan which she gave him as a gift. Here waffles were an indexical sign for her memories with Gabe.

"I was delighted, holding a plate of waffles" (Santopolo,2017, p. 276)

After getting married and being a mam for two kids, Lucy was in her office when her friend Julia told her that there was a photography show for Gabe at Joseph Landis gallery in Chelsea. Lucy went there with Julia, she saw a wall of her pictures when she was twenty-four. In one of the pictures, she was holding a "plate of waffles", looking so happy. Here waffles are an iconic sign of her happy days with Gabe. Waffles also appear as an indexical sign in Lucy's dreams. She saw her imaginer, a happy family, with Gabe. She dreamt that she was making waffles with Gabe, Violet and Liam during the Christmas holidays. All of them were wearing Christmas pajamas and enjoying their time. "We were *making waffles* for Violet and Liam. You were wearing that ridiculous crown. We were all in matching Christmas pajamas"(Santopolo,2017, p. 314)

"Are you sure you're okay enough to make some cookies"(Santopolo,2017, p. 301)

When Lucy and her daughter violet invited Gabe to come to their house and make cookies to cheer him up after the death of his mother. The cookies here become an indexical sign for connection and reuniting between Gabe and Lucy as it was the first time Gabe entered Lucy's house after she get married and had a family.

5.5. Pictures

"We stared at the images"(Santopolo,2017, p. 7)

"You wanted to go onto the roof with your camera after we ate, you told me, and take some pictures" (Santopolo,2017, p. 14)

Since the hero is a photographer, images have been mentioned several times with different indications. The first thing Lucy noticed about Gabe is his photos collection, through which Lucy could notice how good Gabe's images are. He started to tell her the stories for each picture. She started to see him as brave, daring and *"committed to capturing art"*. Therefore, the pictures here mention as an indexical sign that Gabe's passion for photography is going to be the turning point for the rest of the event in their story.

"He has a photography show up at the Joseph Landis gallery"(Santopolo,2017, p. 274)

the Joseph Landis photography gallery was a turning point for all characters. When Lucy saw a wall of her pictures *"confronted with a wall of myself"(*Santopolo,2017, p. 276), is an icon sign for Lucy. While for Gabe it is a symbolic sign as Lucy was his muse and inspiration. And that wall was an expression of his love and gratitude for her *"the exhibit didn't feel complete without you in it. I learned how to capture the lightness of spirit while photographing you. You were my muse, my inspiration for all of those shots"(*Santopolo,2017, p. 278). For Gabe, it was also a symbolic relationship that his dream come true as he becomes a well know photographer who visited several countries to capture the truth, hope, and struggles "we were looking at images from Afghanistan, from Pakistan, from Iraq" (Santopolo,2017, p. 276) "the way you captured the emotion, the way you framed the people, the way everything seemed saturated with color and feeling and determination"(Santopolo,2017, p. 275). While for Darren, the same pictures were an indexical sign of anger, juicy, and competition "He started. And stared. And didn't say a word." (Santopolo,2017, p. 282)

"Can I give Gabe this Picture?...it's a heart and a sun and a lollipop. And smiley face stickers. Because they're happy"(Santopolo,2017, p. 296)

After Violet went with her mother to JFK and saw Gabe's grief after the death of his mother. She painted him a picture and asked her mother to send it to Gabe to cheer him up. The heart in the picture is a symbol of love, the sun is a symbol of hope that the sun will rise every morning after a night, the lollipop is an icon sign of sweetness, and the smiley stickers are an icon of happiness. The entire picture is an icon of innocence and kindness.

"with photographs of our family all around, would somehow make me less desirable for you"(Santopolo,2017, p. 298)

When Darren agreed that they can invite Gabe to their apartment to cheer him up, Lucy thought that he might want Gabe to see their family pictures to give up on loving Lucy. Thus, 'photographs' here is an indexical sign that Darren wanted to show the unity of his family and that Gabe was only a stranger. Therefore, these family pictures are going to make Gabe understands that Lucy has her own happy family.

"I saw your photograph on the front page of the New York Times. You're showing the world what's happening. You're living your dream"(Santopolo,2017, p. 345)

The last time Gabe called Lucy, he was in Jerusalem and was so broken by the death of Palestinian women and children. Lucy tries to console him that she saw his pictures in *the New York Times* and that he is doing a great job. The pictures on the front page of *the New York Times* are an index sign that Gabe is living his dream and showing the world the truth.

5.6 Lights

"Lucy, Luce, Luz is light in Spanish…thank you for filling a dark day with light" (Santopolo,2017, p. 19)

"A woman filled with light makes everything she touches brighter. Lucy, Luce, Luz, Light." (Santopolo,2017, p. 276)

"the exhibit didn't feel complete without you in it. I learned how to capture lightness of spirit while photographing you. "(Santopolo,2017, p. 278)

"the interviewer had asked you about me … you called me your muse, your light" (Santopolo,2017, p. 279)

From the first time they met, Gabe considered Lucy as his light not only because the meaning of her name is in Spanish but also because she make that dark day of 11 September brighter for him. Till the end, Gabe still believed that Lucy was his light, muse, and inspiration. Thus, light is an indexical sign for Lucy.

"the Eiffel Tower as it once again shimmered with light"(Santopolo,2017, p. 200)

Darren proposed to Lucy during their weekend in Paris. They send a great time together and at the end of their trip, Darren proposed to Lucy in front of the Eiffel Tower. The atmosphere was so romantic with the light sparkling along with the Tower. Thus, the light here is a symbolic sign of romance and love.

5.7 Tower

"The kind of job that I'd started thinking about after the tower fell"(Santopolo,2017, p. 23)

"A plane hit one of the twin towers"(Santopolo,2017, p5)

The novel opens with one of the central events that change world politics in the twenty-one century. The fall of the Twin Towers on 11 September attacks did not affect the world politics only but also affected many people's life among them, including Lucy and Gabe. Therefore, the Twin Towers are a symbolic sign of terrorist attacks and an event that changed the world forever.

"The Eiffel Tower was still sparkling "(Santopolo,2017, p. 201)

Another Tower that changed Lucy, Darren and Gabe's life is The Eiffel Tower, where Darren proposed to Lucy. However, the Eiffel Tower is a symbolic sign of love, magic, and romance.

5.8 Haircut

"took me to a salon for a brand-new haircut" (Santopolo,2017, p. 100)

After Gabe left Lucy, she was depressed for a while then her close friend Alexis helped her to recover by dressing up every night and going to bars, parties, concerts, and movies. Alexis even took Lucy to the spa and salon to have a new haircut. Therefore, a "brand-new haircut" for women is always a symbolic sign of starting over after a harsh breakup. However, for Gabe the situation is the opposite as he also cut his hair after the death of his mother "The first thing I noticed was that you'd shaved your head" (Santopolo,2017, p. 300), here "shaved your head" is an indexical sign for melancholy and grief. Later on when Lucy saw Gabe with his hair "had grown back" (Santopolo,2017, p. 324) as an indexical sign that he has recovered from his grief of moaning his mother's death.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher selects semiotics as it becomes an essential field in modern studies. Semiotics theory according to Charles Sanders Peirce reveals all different types of signs in *the Light we Lost*. Accordingly, the researcher picks a couple of signs that have been mentioned several times with different indications and tries to examine them through Peirce's triadic theory. Crown, books, 11 September, light, pictures, Towers, waffles, and haircuts are the main signs in Jill Santopolo's selected novel. Each sign has been accorded more than once with different indications.

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